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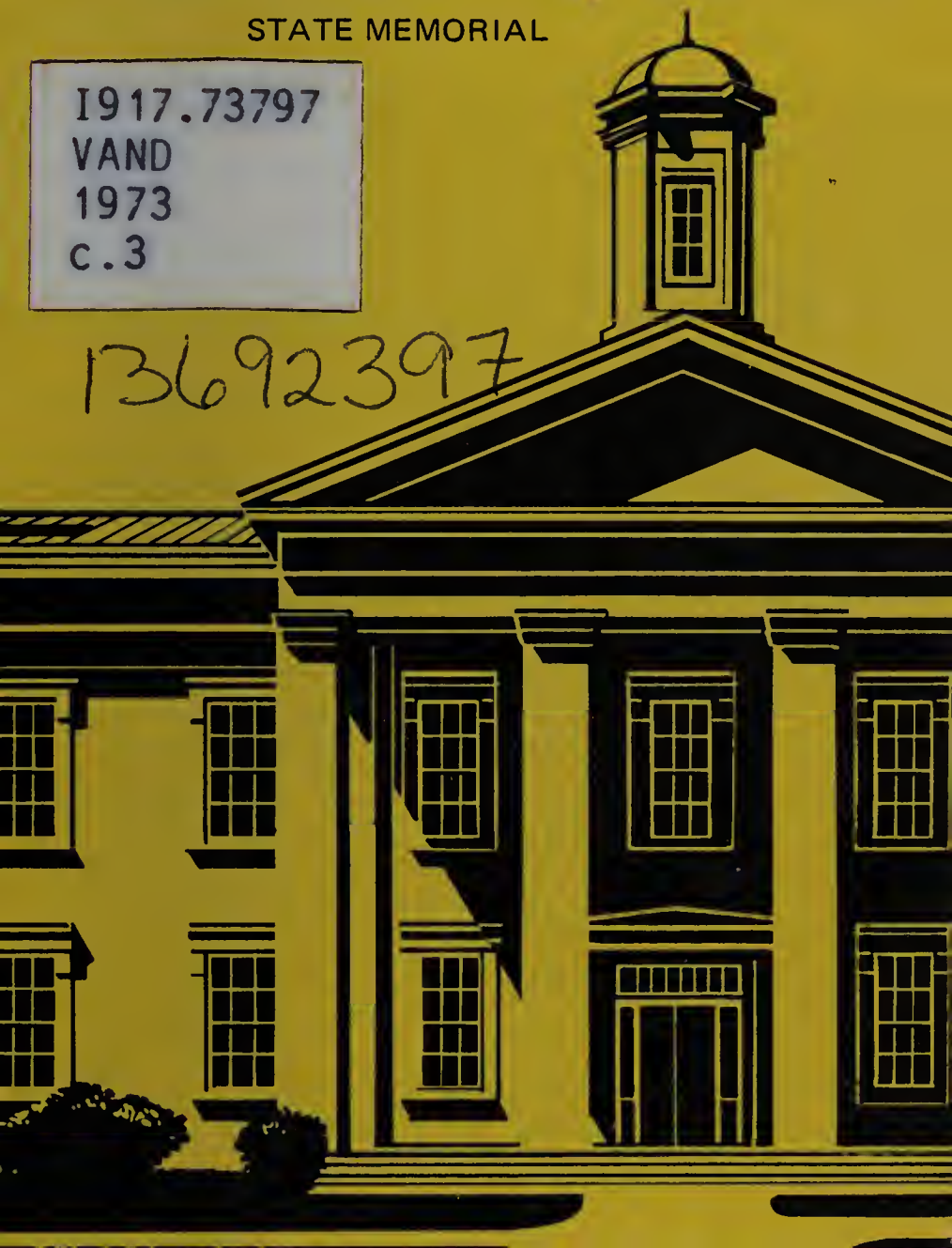
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vandalia statehouse

STATE MEMORIAL

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CAPITAL MOVED TO VANDALIA

Although a rented building in Kaskaskia was the first statehouse from 1818 to 1820, the first Capitol erected by the state was in Vandalia, the capital city from 1820 to 1839.

The removal of the capital from Kaskaskia to Vandalia grew out of a mania for speculation since it was believed by many that money could be made by starting a land boom in a new location. Accordingly, Congress was petitioned and four sections of land were granted by the state providing that a town be laid out on the site and the state capital remain there for twenty years. The choice of the grant was limited to the Kaskaskia River, "as near as might be east of the third principal meridian on that river." The place selected by the Board of Commissioners appointed for the purpose was known as Reeve's Bluff, situated on the west bank of the river.

First Building Erected: The site was cleared, named Vandalia and a two-story log statehouse was constructed. The State Archives were brought from Kankaskia in a small wagon and on December 4, 1820, the first session of the Second General Assembly met here. Fire destroyed this building on December 12, 1823, and not a single article belonging to the statehouse was saved.

VANDALIA REBUILDS

In 1824 the townspeople of Vandalia remodeled and repaired the old State Bank, a two-story brick structure, as the new statehouse. However, this building was a poor reconstruction and almost ready to fall down at the time of the arrival of State Representative Abraham Lincoln in 1834.

Realizing the many inadequacies of this building and hoping to keep the seat of government, Vandalia citizens, including Auditor of Public Accounts Levi Davis, raised \$16,000 without legislative authority and constructed another building in 1836. This is the building still standing today as the Vandalia Statehouse.

STRUGGLE OVER LOCATION

As the center of population shifted, proposals were initiated to again move the capital northward. Vandalia supporters urged as an argument that while their city was metropolitan, it would be necessary in Springfield to live on venison, bear meat and prairie chicken. This was not the case. The Vandalia supporters argued that "hog meat" was plentiful, taverns dispensed imported vintages and living conditions were generally more advanced as Vandalia became the political and social capital of the state. In addition, Vandalia had just built a new statehouse.

The state accepted the building early in 1837 but on February 28, 1837, the General Assembly by a joint vote selected Springfield to succeed Vandalia as the capital. The selection of Springfield was done contrary to a popular vote that would have moved the capital to Alton. Abraham Lincoln was a leader of a group of Sangamon County legislators known as the "Long Nine" (their total height was 54 feet) who influenced the General Assembly to pass the bill.

IMPORTANT DECISIONS

Some of the most important measures in the state's history were discussed, debated and settled at Vandalia, decisions that would affect the state and nation as well. Slavery was one vital issue and much was accomplished here that kept Illinois a free state.

Also enacted in the General Assembly during these years were the first school laws of Illinois, the act incorporating the Town of Chicago and the first internal improvement laws.

Lincoln's Early Years: The frontier capital of Vandalia was an ideal place for an unpolished, ambitious young man seeking his career. Even though Vandalia did not impress Lincoln upon his arrival in 1834, his years spent here contributed to the success of his career. Mingling with the political and social figures of the day, Lincoln received an education more valuable than anything he could learn from books. Here he not only met the great Illinoisans of the period, but also learned he could lead them.



Madonna of the Trail statue.

STATEHOUSE BECOMES A MEMORIAL

The last session of the General Assembly held in Vandalia began on December 3, 1838, and ended March 4, 1839. During this session an Act was passed conveying the Vandalia Statehouse to Fayette County and the town of Vandalia to be used jointly as a court house and a school. In 1856 the town gave its half of the building to the county. The building was remodeled in 1858-1859, adding the north and south porticos with their brick columns. Although the State of Illinois bought the building and the square on which it stands in 1919, the structure continued to be used as the Fayette County Courthouse. In 1933 the state began to restore the statehouse to its present condition and dedicated it as a state memorial under the jurisdiction of the Department of Conservation.

MADONNA OF THE TRAIL

On the corner of the statehouse ground is "The Madonna of the Trail," a monument to pioneer mothers, dedicated in 1928 as a gift to Illinois and the nation from the Daughters of the American Revolution. It is one of a series erected by this organization marking the Cumberland Trail. Vandalia in the early days was the terminus of this national road which was authorized and built under President Thomas Jefferson in 1806.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION . . .

Nearby Lincoln points of interest are the Lincoln Home, the Old State Capitol and the Lincoln Tomb, all in Springfield. Other state parks and memorials involving Lincoln include Lincoln Log Cabin, Lincoln Salt Creek, Lincoln Trail, Lincoln Trail Homestead, Lincoln's New Salem, Lincoln Monument, Lincoln Trail Monument, Mt. Pulaski Courthouse, Postville Courthouse and Metamora Courthouse.

For further information concerning Illinois State Parks and Memorials write to the Department of Conservation, Division of Education, State Office Building, Springfield, 62706.



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